

Essay type questions are used in most of the test papers in the GCE AL Examination. A fairly common practice in the use of essay questions is to give options to students to select questions. Despite the pervasiveness of this technique, however, most testing experts agree that such a procedure is not good testing practice. These warnings concerning the use of options on essay examinations usually center on the issues of content validity, reliability, and undesirable study habits. If, however it is necessary to allow a choice of questions, it is important to try to ensure that the questions are of equal difficulty and marked with equal severity.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of the use of optional questions in essay type papers in the AL Examination and check whether the questions are constructed in accordance to the testing principles mentioned above. These objectives were investigated through a study of test papers set for Economics in the GCE-AL Examination. It was revealed that the use of optional questions has caused inter-item variability in Economics papers. Questions with different cognitive abilities are included in sub-parts but most of the questions are constructed on the comprehension ability. If the difficulty of a question considers only on the facility index, considerable paper. Consequently giving options in such a case cannot have a serious effect on the fairness and the validity of the examination.